

MYANMAR: AMNESTY CONDEMNS NEW ROUND OF MASS ARRESTS

Amnesty International today condemned the arrest of at least 50 National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders by the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) over the past few days. The human rights organization called for their immediate and unconditional release.

NLD leaders from around the country were arrested while travelling to the house of party leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon to attend a meeting to celebrate the seventh anniversary of their election victory on 27 May 1990.

“The SLORC is bent on crushing the peaceful activities of a party which won more than 80% of the seats in the 1990 general election,” Amnesty International said. “Last year was the worst year for human rights since the government annulled the elections. Now the SLORC seems determined to eliminate the party altogether.”

“All governments, but particularly the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – which is expected to admit Myanmar as a member this year – should protest to the SLORC in the strongest possible terms about these arrests and pressure the government to improve its human rights record. These latest arrests yet again demonstrate that for all the emphasis placed on constructive engagement by Myanmar’s regional neighbours, the SLORC is as repressive as ever.”

Some 200 members of parliament-elect and 100 party organizers were invited to the meeting. Leaders from Sagaing, Ayeyarwady and Mandalay Divisions have been picked up, but none from Yangon have yet been detained. However Amnesty International fears that the authorities will arrest all 300 of these participants.

The move came one day after the USA signed into law economic sanctions which would prevent any new US businesses from operating in Myanmar. US officials have stated that sanctions were invoked because of the deteriorating human rights situation there.

During 1996 over 2,000 people were arrested, the vast majority of them NLD supporters – including hundreds of students and NLD members who were arrested following the forcible suppression of peaceful student demonstrations in December. Although many of these people have been released, dozens have been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

In early 1997, over 40 NLD members and students imprisoned in Insein Jail were moved to prisons in remote parts of the country, preventing them from receiving any family assistance. Several of these, including U Win Htein and other prisoners of conscience, are suffering from poor health as a result of prison conditions. Since September 1996, any public gatherings in front of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s house have been forbidden. She and other senior party leaders are subjected to surveillance, restriction of movement, and other forms of intimidation
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